

Message

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Subject: USS Lead - Press

East Chicago press clips
US EPA Region 5 – prepared by the Office of Public Affairs
October 17, 2016

NWI Times – Local residents aim to represent Calumet under East Chicago United name

NWI Times - East Chicago school superintendent pushing forward

WBEZ - East Chicago Residents Fear For Their Health

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/residents-aim-to-represent-calumet-under-east-chicago-united-name/article_281e7cd3-d9ef-5d52-9897-83c4ed4ea122.html

Residents aim to represent Superfund site under 'East Chicago Undivided' name

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- Updated Oct 15, 2016 EAST CHICAGO — Michael Jacobi did not hold back his frustration Saturday with the Environmental Protection Agency's plan to address the most highly lead- and arsenic-contaminated properties this season in the eastern section of the Calumet neighborhood but delay cleanup elsewhere.

"As long as they continue to do this, nothing is getting fixed," said Jacobi, 31, who lives within the EPA's USS Lead Superfund site with his newly pregnant wife. "The mayor isn't helping. The majority of the government is not helping, and they don't care."

The contamination has been known for decades, he said, yet the thousands of families living in the EPA's USS Lead Superfund site continue to live on toxic land, he said.

His neighbor's yard is being cleaned up this year and EPA officials say his property will have to wait until next year at the earliest, he said. And he's worried lead and arsenic could become airborne or transfer to his property during heavy rains.

EPA began excavation work this month in zone 3, which is the eastern third of the neighborhood. It plans to clean up 18 properties and part of Riley Park this construction season. The agency has said it plans to mitigate the possibility of airborne contaminants.

Jacobi's comments came during a public meeting at the East Chicago Public Library's Pastrick Branch, allowing residents to brainstorm issues to tackle as part of the soon-to-be-formed Community Advisory Group.

Maritza Lopez, a resident on Euclid Avenue in the Superfund zone and a spokesperson for the group, told Jacobi his anger is a perfect example of why the community needs to unify.

"That's what this (Community Advisory Group) is about. This is the opportunity that we have. This all could have been fixed years ago," Lopez said.

She defended the EPA, saying the agency is one of the few that have been responsive to residents this summer.

The CAG's goal is to take issues and concerns to the EPA, said

At Saturday's meeting, residents prioritized the following as key issues: health issues; relocation and housing; soil, groundwater and other testing; future property use; and public outreach.

The EPA's Superfund site is divided into three cleanup zones — bounded by Chicago Avenue to the north, 151st Street and 149th Street to the south, the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal to the west and Parrish Avenue to the east.

At the meeting, residents ultimately voted to name the group 'East Chicago Undivided,' Lopez said.

"We are all one Superfund site ... Keep that in mind. We are fighting this together," Lopez said.

"We've all been contaminated, we've all been getting sick. We all have lead. We all have arsenic. We all are going through the same situation and for generations."

The next meeting is set for 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday at the East Chicago Public Library, 1008 W. Chicago Avenue.

An EPA representative who specializes in CAGs will meet with the group from 1 to 3 p.m. Oct. 29, where they will become certified.

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/special-section/ec-lead/east-chicago-school-superintendent-pushing-forward/article_7846eb58-e667-58f6-be6e-1893102a2f30.html

East Chicago school superintendent pushing forward

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EAST CHICAGO — East Chicago school Superintendent Paige McNulty believes she's making headway in her conversations with legislators across the state regarding the issues surrounding the Carrie Gosch Elementary School building.

Carrie Gosch Elementary, 455 E. 148th St., sits on lead-contaminated soil, and was closed a week before school was scheduled to start this year as a result of the lead problems in the West Calumet Housing Complex.

McNulty said it has created havoc with finances, enrollment and student services.

As of Friday, McNulty said about 335 students are enrolled at the new Carrie Gosch, now in the former West Side Middle School, still about 200 short of the number of Carrie Gosch students who were enrolled last school year. She said the number changes daily as families move out of the area.

McNulty wants the state to hold the district harmless regarding enrollment, which will require legislative action. That means she would like the district to receive state funding as though Carrie Gosch were operating at full enrollment.

She has used a \$3 million loan from the State Board of Education for the move from the old building to the new Carrie Gosch and to refresh and update the school for use by elementary-age students.

Working at the state level

Indiana education leader Glenda Ritz visited the new building and toured the old building a couple of weeks ago, where U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials were busy working on their plan of action.

“Since my visit to Carrie Gosch a few weeks ago, I have continued to work closely with the local schools and community during this transition,” Ritz said.

“My outreach team is providing ongoing support and resources to the community, and we continue to evaluate what flexibility may be available to free up additional resources and federal funding for East Chicago Schools. I look forward to working with the General Assembly during the upcoming legislative session to address any financial concerns.”

McNulty has been talking to Indiana legislators Sen. Lonnie Randolph, D-East Chicago, Sen. Luke Kenley, R-Noblesville, and Sen. Edward Charbonneau, R-Valparaiso, as well as federal leaders.

Randolph said Thursday morning that legislative services is drafting the language for legislation that will be introduced when the new legislative session starts in January, but it isn't ready yet.

“We're still working on the language, but it will include waiver language for the school district,” he said.

“There have been rumors for many years about the lead in the ground there,” Randolph said.

“I grew up in that neighborhood and probably ought to be tested myself. There were people who were aware of the contamination in the early 1970s,” he said. “Someone should have told residents about the contamination, and this is going to be the effect on you and your children. There should have been a remedy and compensation for losses.

“Despite that, I met a young woman at a meeting just recently who told me she had just moved into the West Calumet complex, and that's after the letters went out about the lead in the soil.”

Randolph said when the new Carrie Gosch building was constructed in 1999, there should have been environmental studies done and reports made.

“What were the results of those studies done before the school was rebuilt, and what happened to the information that was discovered at that site?” he asked.

Kenley said he has had good conversations with McNulty, and she has laid out the situation well.

“We have our people digging into the details of the funding formula, and we're working with the Department of Education,” he said.

“This was an unpredictable event that they're having to deal with. It's a unique problem that we have to pay attention to. It's really unfortunate for East Chicago to have this circumstance. I have a lot of

confidence in Paige. She is very prepared and proactive, and that will help us in sorting out what we can contribute.”

Status of students

McNulty said some West Calumet families have moved to other communities such as Hammond and Gary, and some families are living with relatives and thus deemed homeless for federal school purposes.

Those homeless students come under the federal McKinney-Vento Act, which provides financial assistance to school districts to ensure immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless children.

“We are providing bus transportation to and from school for about a dozen students whose families have moved to other communities, but have maintained their child’s enrollment in the East Chicago schools,” McNulty said.

“It’s a strain on our transportation system, but it’s worth it. We’re still in the process of renovating the new Carrie Gosch.”

McNulty said the lead problems in East Chicago are similar to the problems in Flint, Michigan, where that community had lead in its drinking water.

The problems in Flint began in April 2014 after the city changed its water source from treated Detroit water, which was sourced from Lake Huron and the Detroit River, to the Flint River, to which officials had failed to apply corrosion inhibitors. Flint’s drinking water had a series of problems that culminated with lead contamination, creating a serious public health danger.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, children younger than 5 years old, and especially infants and unborn children, bear the greatest risk of deleterious and irreversible health outcomes from lead exposure.

McNulty said she has had several conversations with Flint Community Schools Superintendent Bilal Tawwab, who has been helpful in talking about how that school district met the challenges.

In an emailed response, Tawwab said it’s unfortunate that another school system is going through a similar situation to what Flint faced.

“Tough challenges are great opportunities for those in the community and those with a vested interest in young people to come together for the greater good of educating students,” he wrote.

“I shared some of the strategies Flint Community Schools has had success with and provided suggestions on ways to keep teachers focused on teaching and students focused on learning.”

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/education/the-history-of-carrie-gosch-elementary/article_55f9701f-7e07-532d-b9e7-0e4c8f5f249b.html

The history of Carrie Gosch Elementary

- Carmen McCollum The fate of Carrie Gosch Elementary School in East Chicago is tied to the neighborhood and land the various school buildings have been part of. Here is a partial history of the school in all its embodiments over the years.

1950s: Carrie Gosch Elementary School replaces the former James A. Garfield School, which is destroyed by fire on Jan. 6, 1956. The Garfield school originally had been constructed in 1912 to replace the old Lew Wallace School, built in 1902, which was at the southeast corner of 148th and Melville Avenue in East Chicago.

During the interim between the burning of Garfield school and the completion of the first Carrie Gosch school building in 1959, upper elementary students in the Calumet area are housed in the Blaw-Knox office building at 420 E. 151st St. Students in kindergarten and other primary grades have classes at the First Baptist Church at 149th and McCook and in temporary housing at the Garfield site. Other primary classes are housed at the Croation Center at the corner of Carey Street and Chicago Avenue and at Columbia Hall of Holy Trinity Hungarian Parish.

Carrie Gosch is at 455 E. 148th St. Contracts are awarded on May 21, 1958, and ground is broken on June 4, 1958. The site consists of 15 acres formerly owned by the Continental Foundry & Machine Division of Blaw-Knox Co. and purchased by the School City of East Chicago on Sept. 5, 1956, at a cost of \$50,000.

The total cost of the new site and building, with the exception of furniture and equipment, is approximately \$1.1 million. It is designed for a capacity of 1,050 students. There are 33 classrooms for students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

Classes start in September 1959. An open house and dedication for the school is held on Nov. 8, 1959.

Lead factories in East Chicago's Calumet neighborhood date back to the early 1900s. Aerial photographs show the former Anaconda Lead Products facility that still existed in 1959 in the area of the present-day West Calumet Housing Complex, about six blocks south of Carrie Gosch.

1960s/1970s/1980s: Marla Spann, 49, remembers growing up in the West Calumet area playing in the dirt, making mud pies and eating the green beans growing in her grandmother's yard.

"I don't remember ever hearing any talk about lead," she says.

The West Calumet homes are built in the early 1970s.

Spann attends Carrie Gosch, starting kindergarten in 1973. She says Nick Serengach is principal then. She well remembers one of her favorite teachers, Sandra Scull, who teaches her in third grade. Spann has Scull again in sixth grade, when Scull teaches art. Scull starts a black history museum within the school.

"She had a group called 'The young ladies,' and she did a lot to teach us about how to be young ladies," Spann says.

"I grew up on Vernon Street and that was right behind Carrie Gosch. My grandmother lived in front of Carrie Gosch, and I spent quite a lot of time over there, eating the food out of her garden and playing in the grass and dirt."

1990s: By the 1990s, the Carrie Gosch building is old and worn. East Chicago school leaders propose constructing a new building on the same site. The new Carrie Gosch will be built behind the existing school, enabling students to stay in classes at the old school while the new building is constructed.

The proposed cost for the new building is \$15.9 million according to reports to the school board. Architects for the project are Bittner & Ditela Inc. The general contractor is Gough Construction.

Spann has worked at the East Chicago Public Library since March 1991. She said she has learned more about the lead contamination in the West Calumet neighborhood and around the school this year more than when she lived there because of news reports, and residents and politicians stopping in to check out the materials she has gathered for their perusal.'

"West Calumet has paired duplexes, and there is an apartment building," Spann says. "It was called the West Calumet Complex rather than the projects. It wasn't considered a bad area when I was growing up. You didn't ride through there then and think you were in a low-income area."

Elaine Kisisel, 76, is on the East Chicago School Board from 1987 to 2007. She says she doesn't recall any discussion about a lead problem around the school.

Fellow board member Henry Gillis, 84, becomes a school board member sometime after 1991, after he retires as principal of West Side Middle School and is on the board for 14 years, he says. He is the first principal at the middle school and is there 15 years, he adds.

"I don't remember any talk about lead problems," he says.

"All those houses were built on the same spot where the lead plant was located. My father worked at the lead plant. If we had known the soil was contaminated out there, we wouldn't have built a school there."

2000s/2010s: Between 2005 and 2015, preliminary tests show more than 20 percent of children in the census tract that includes the West Calumet housing complex have elevated blood lead levels, according to the Indiana State Department of Health.

The national average during that decade is fewer than 1 percent of children.

The entire Calumet neighborhood along with the USS Lead facility is listed on the Superfund National Priorities List in April 2009.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency maintains it would be safe for residents to continue living at the complex during soil excavation, but the federal agency says it will follow the city's lead. Digging is on hold in zone 1, which includes the complex, until the city, ECHA and HUD determine a future use for the land.

2016: In May, the EPA tells families in the West Calumet complex that they and their children are living on land severely contaminated by lead and arsenic.

In summer, the city and the ECHA decide to demolish all 346 units at the complex and relocate more than 1,000 residents living there, including more than 600 children enrolled in schools within the School City of East Chicago.

The youngsters and families in the part of West Calumet with homes (zone 2) and East Calumet (zone 3) don't have to move.

East Chicago schools Superintendent Paige McNulty closes Carrie Gosch Elementary School located at 455 E. 148th St. in the West Calumet area less than a week before school starts in August due to lead and arsenic contamination in the soil.

The EPA rents several classrooms in the building as its headquarters while working on plans regarding the lead problems.

Sen. Lonnie Randolph, D-East Chicago, says the information about lead and arsenic in the soil was never communicated to residents when the complex was built.

"Someone dropped the ball," he says. "Was that done because it was built as low-income housing for black folk? It was probably 99 percent black then. Did people just not care? It's still probably 90 percent black though other races have moved in. There have been lawsuits filed, and there will be additional lawsuits filed."

<https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/east-chicago-residents-fear-for-their-health/62e877e8-ecca-4530-9908-a3c4a316309c>

East Chicago Residents Fear For Their Health

Michael Puente
October 17, 2016

Colleen Aguirre recently drove through East Chicago, Indiana and pointed out residential areas with potentially hazardous pollution lurking underground.

East Chicago, which has been home to large steel mills since the late 1800s, received national attention this year after lead was discovered in the soil beneath a public housing complex and elementary school. The discovery prompted city officials to form a plan to relocate more than 1,100 residents of the West Calumet Housing Complex.

But Aguirre, a longtime political and environmental activist, said the city has ignored other areas that could be just as dangerous.

Aguirre, 73, said officials should listen to her now because she warned them nearly 50 years ago about the dangers of building upon old factory sites.

Those sites were chosen in the late 1960s, when East Chicago needed a place for public housing. With available land scarce, the housing director decided to build the West Calumet Housing Complex on land that had been used by Anaconda Lead Products, a lead and copper smelting company.

But it wasn't until this year the government announced unsafe lead levels were found in the soil, a revelation that meant decades of public housing residents could have been exposed to the hazardous element.

Now West Calumet residents, nearly one-third of them children, have been urged to get their blood tested for lead poisoning. The government wants to relocate the residents, a process that is expected to cost more than \$1 million.

While West Calumet is getting national headlines for its lead crisis, residents in other parts of the city want to know why their neighborhood has not been tested.

'IT'S ALL POLLUTED IN EAST CHICAGO'

Aguirre said she didn't think the location of the West Calumet complex was a good idea in the 1960s.

"When I talk to the one guy, I don't think he cared. I said, 'Don't you test everything before [you] build somewhere? And he just looked at me [as] if I were crazy or I was from the moon,'" Aguirre said.

Aguirre spent most of her life in East Chicago. She claimed those in favor of building the housing complex in the 1960s thought poor people wouldn't care where it was built.

"What difference does it make? These people don't give a damn at all ... That's just the mentality they had," Aguirre said.

She said federal, state and local officials now need to test other East Chicago neighborhoods for lead.

One neighborhood of concern is a small, low-income area called New Addition, about a mile north of the West Calumet complex.

According to records from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, New Addition has two areas where development could be "complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant." In addition, the neighborhood has oil storage tanks and a chemical plant.

Being surrounded by potentially harmful chemicals is not a big deal for Eric Collier, a 56-year-old steelworker who lives in New Addition.

"It's all polluted in East Chicago. That ain't nothing new to nobody," Collier said. "That's where everybody made their money is in these mills. You had to make money, you had to eat."

Collier claimed East Chicago is similar to the Southeast Side of Chicago--an area saturated with heavy industry and legacy pollution.

"Those that come from Chicago that claims that they got it, they had the same thing over there," Collier said.

'THIS IS A HIGHLY POLLUTED AREA'

Like many Rust Belt cities, East Chicago has seen its population decline. It now has about 32,000 residents, most of them black and Latino.

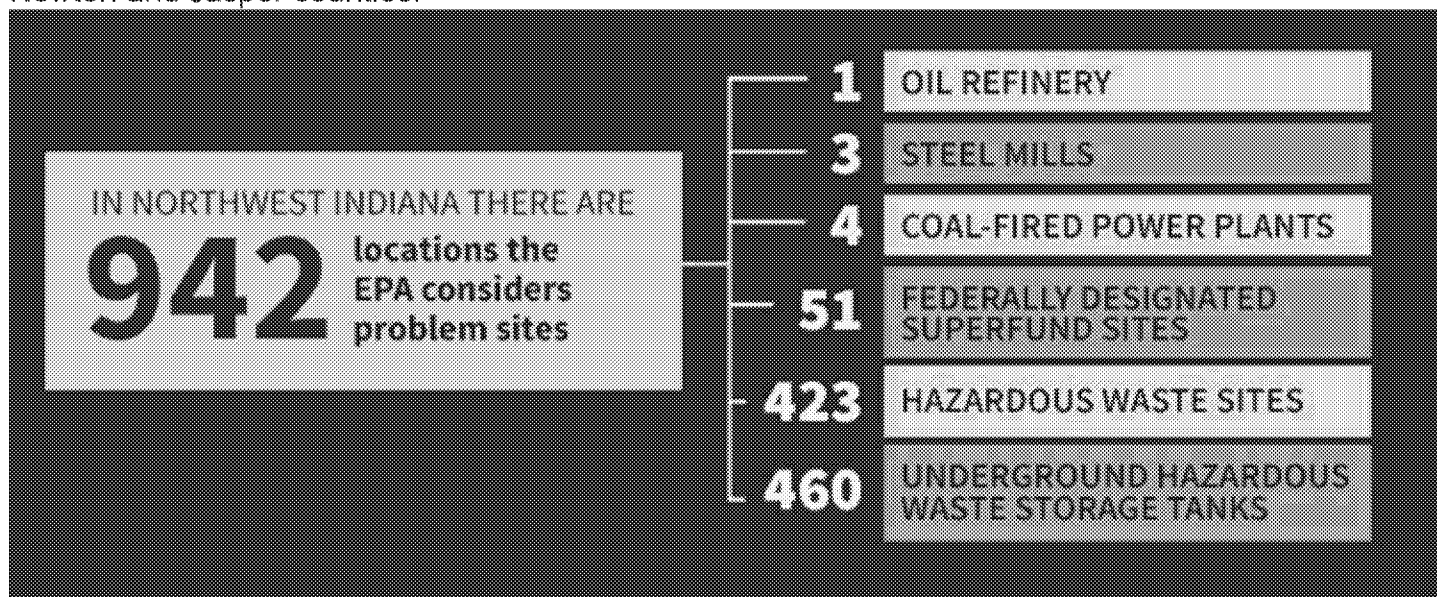
But combined with neighboring Hammond, Whiting and Gary, the area still forms a major Midwest industrial corridor.

"The area is the most densely industrial area anywhere in the state, if not the nation. This area is home to three of the nation's largest integrated steel mills, one of the world's largest oil refineries, BP, I think there are three or four coal fired power plants," said Kim Ferraro, senior attorney for the not-for-profit Hoosier Environmental Council. "I can't even begin to count how many industrial facilities that includes--smelters, toxic recyclers, chemical companies, manufacturing facilities."

For the better part of a the last century, all these companies have meant jobs, along with a lot of pollution.

"There are 423 hazardous waste sites, more than 460 underground storage tanks which contain hazardous waste, three wastewater treatment plants and 15 combined sewer flows," Ferraro said. "This is a highly polluted area, and it's been that way for a very long time."

The EPA has designated 942 potential problem sites in Northwest Indiana--Lake, Porter, LaPorte, Newton and Jasper counties.



In Lake, Porter, LaPorte, Newton and Jasper counties, there are 942 sites that contribute to the pollution problem in Northwest Indiana. (Paula Friedrich/WBEZ)

In East Chicago, the West Calumet complex is part of a federally-designated superfund cleanup site that includes hundreds of residential homes.

Ferraro said the complex was proposed for a cleanup in 1992, but it got put off for almost 20 years.

"What brought this situation to light was not very clear, given the fact the West Calumet site was actually proposed for superfund clean up back in 1992," Ferraro said.

But West Calumet didn't get funding to be cleaned up for another 17 years--in 2009.

"And, at that time, levels of lead were thought to be so high that it was determined to be a health threat to children, but yet still nothing was done," Ferraro claimed. "So, why all of a sudden (this) came to be the big crisis that it is -- because it should have been a big crisis for EPA long ago."

EPA Region 5 Acting Administrator Robert Kaplan said the EPA has been testing in the West Calumet area since 2007. Two years ago, the EPA came up with a plan to clean up the West Calumet area without moving residents out.

But in late May, East Chicago Mayor Anthony Copeland discovered lead levels in the soil were extremely high in certain areas of the housing project, prompting him to contact the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and request the residents be moved to safer housing.

However, the move caused major headaches for residents, some of whom have lived in the housing complex for decades. They now have until the end of November to find alternative housing.

‘THERE ISN’T ONE CLEAN AREA’

There are 51 other federal superfund sites in the areas of Gary, Hammond and East Chicago.

Aguirre can’t answer why the West Calumet complex is being cleaned up now, but said the surge of attention needs to expand to the rest of the city.

“Every area of East Chicago should be tested. There isn’t one clean area and they are all contaminated with one thing or another because companies have dumped here in the middle of the night,” Aguirre said. “It’s a shame, but all these people—they didn’t know it. They brought their new babies home. They had their kids playing in the yards and they didn’t know that it was all contaminated.”

Like Collier, Silver Sanders lived near the New Addition neighborhood for years, right next to the chemical plant Pollution Control Industries.

Sanders wants his blood tested—and his neighbors’ too.

“I believe there’s a lot of contaminated ground around us that we breathe in, we’re exposed to it and everything else,” Sanders said. “We have a lot of unexplained deaths and sickness in this area, and nobody can tell us why? The suspect is all the things we breathe.”

Lonnie Randolph, a longtime Indiana state senator who represents East Chicago, said state environmental officials may have looked the other way as long as taxes from industry flowed south to Indianapolis.

“The industries have kind of swamped the area to the point in providing jobs and tax money for the county, the state and the city, that maybe some heads may have been turned the other way purposely, maybe negligently, not thinking about how drastic effect the environment might have on the residents,” said Randolph, who has been the most outspoken elected official since the West Calumet situation started last summer.

But Sanders is optimistic.

He hopes the attention on the West Calumet complex means the days of his city being ignored may have come to an end.

“All the people in East Chicago felt like they can come and mistreat us and dump their waste and byproduct on us and it’s acceptable,” Sanders said. “Well, it’s never been acceptable. We just didn’t have enough voices and people to speak up, but today is a new day.”

Perhaps it’s just not people speaking up that’s causing heads to turn, but the threat of lawsuits as well.

At least three federal lawsuits have been filed against the city by West Calumet residents. Meanwhile, Carla Morgan, the city attorney for the city of East Chicago and the mayor’s spokeswoman, acknowledged there could be a need for residents in other areas of the city to get their health and soil tested.

But she said there are currently no plans to expand the testing beyond the West Calumet superfund area.

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Sincerely,

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